Title: **Representing History, Class-identity and Urbanity in Select Indian Graphic Novels**

Name of Scholar: Subhaiyu Chakraborty

Supervisor: Dr. Sudev Pratim Basu

Registration no. VB-1728 of 2014-14

Date of Registration: 13.05.2013/ 13.05.2018

Synopsis

In recent times the growth and popularity of the graphic novel across the country have led to an inquiry into this form of writing. Graphic novels had been already a popular form in America, the beginnings of which is traced to Will Eisner's 1978 short story collection, *A Contract With God.* In recent times the growth and popularity of the graphic novel across the world have led to an inquiry into this form of writing. However, graphic novels by Indian novelists are an upcoming area that has interested researchers in academics who try to decipher the politics behind these novels. The focus of this research shall be to locate how the selected graphic novels depict the social issues through sequential art.

Even if Indian Graphic novels are in their nascent stage, there is an attempt made by the novelists to carve it as a medium of expression voicing social concerns. Graphic novels gained prominence in India around 1994 with the publication of *River of Stories* (1994) by Orijit Sen. Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor* (2004) is at times considered the first predominant graphic novel. Other popular graphic novels are *Kari* (2008)by Amruta Patil, *The Barn Owl`s Wondrous Capers* (2007*)* by Sarnath Banerjee, *Delhi Calm* (2010) by Vishwajyoti Ghosh and *Bhimayana:Experiences of Untouchability* (2011) by Srividya Natrajan and S. Anand.. These stories are based on fact and fiction that have significantly contributed to the public cultural practices of the nation. The texts have debated history and historical events like Partition, social issues such as caste, child abuse, violence against women, documented lives and satirized contemporary Indian culture.

For the purpose of my research the novels that I take up are: *Kashmir Pending* (2007) by Naseer Ahmed and *Delhi Calm* (2010) by Vishwajyoti Ghosh that deal with the history of India during political strife and violence; Sarnath Banerjee's The *Barn Owl`s Wondrous Capers* (2007), *Corridor* (2004) and *The Harappa Files* (2011)attempts to show multiple strands of urbanity. On the other hand Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008) and Rimi Chatterjee's *Killer* (2010) deal with claustrophobic existence, which is intrinsic to urban experience; finally *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* (2011) and *A Gardener In The Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty (2011) by* Natrajan Srividya depict class hierarchy practiced in colonial India. The research questions that my thesis shall explore are: Why is there an insurgence of graphic novels in India? How do the novels portray grave social issues? How sequential art is used as a plausible technique to bring out the common themes? Is there correspondence between the text and the image in the graphic novels? Is there any relation among graphic novels, magic realism and meta-fiction? For this purpose I will also draw on postmodernist theories of Baudrillard and Lyotard to explain the influence of images in our lives. Another major area that I shall draw upon is the use of magic realism and meta-fiction in this form of writing. The poststructuralist notion

of deconstruction shall be drawn when I shall reflect how words, phrases are not self sufficient in itself, but depend highly on use of images that compliment each other. Moreover, there are a large number of left out spaces in a graphic novel that is left un-illustrated for the sake of the readers to fill in these gaps, and here reader response theory shall take up a major role.

My thesis shall be divided under the following chapters: In the Introduction I shall lay a brief framework of my argument about what exactly the research is concerned with and why graphic novels across India are my area of interest. Chapter 1 will elaborately lay out the origin and development of Indian graphic novel, beginning from caricature, comics, American graphic fiction to its acceptance in the libraries and academics as a separate mode of expression, in other words in the literary canon. It shall make a survey of the context under which Indian graphic novels develop and also make an extensive study of some important works that have been already done in this area. Chapter 2 shall highlight theme of political strife and violence in Kashmir Pending and Delhi Calm. Chapter 3 shall deal with the issues of class hierarchy in the novels Bhimayana: *Experiences of Untouchability* and A Gardener in the Wasteland: *Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty*. Chapter 4 will look into the *rewriting of different perspectives of urbanity* in *The Barn Owl`s Wondrous Capers, Corridor and The Harappa Files.* Chapter 5 will focus on claustrophobic existence in modern life in Kari and Killer. Chapter 6 will incorporate all the above mentioned issues as illustrated through the use of sequential art and language in the novels. Finally Chapter 7 will conclude my research argument where I shall try to arrive at a conclusion to my work and locate how my research adds to the already existent body of knowledge on Indian graphic novel.

What interests me the most is the way in which graphic novel tell a story through, to use the term coined by Will Eisner, sequential art. There is a definite beginning, middle, and an end to the work as a whole, with each narrative moment studied through the use of both word and image. Image and text refer back and forth to each other. The vocabulary of graphic novels is typically no less challenging than that of a traditional text targeting the same age group. In fact, to read a graphic novel successfully, a reader must consider input from two types of communication at once, visual and written. The graphic novel indeed includes pictures, but the images must be integrated with the text in such a manner so that together they provide a narrative that is richer than either element can provide alone. The photographs or plates in an art book are, of course, intended to be the viewer's primary focus, and the accompanying text is meant to supplement the images rather than to complete the communication.

Roland Barthes, a French aesthetics and semiology scholar has written extensively on the use of images in thought and communication, culture and identity. Similarly Thomas Berger, a theoretician concerned directly with consciousness and image, treats vision and imagination as two access points between the individual and his world. With the increase in visual stimuli in everyday surroundings, text books as the only source of information fails to capture our attention as multimedia images do.The repeated use of techniques through graphic novels as balloons, bubbles, captions, iconography, onomatopoeia, visual hyperboles consisting of facial and body movements, use of colours to depict emotions are my area of interest. I shall try to elaborate how the images form a narrative that is almost complete in itself. To conclude, it is my hope that this research will enrich the existing scholarship on Indian graphic novels by outlining how through the use of text and images indispensable issues pertaining to society are brought to the forefront. I will try to add to the existent body of knowledge on Indian graphic novels by outlining how

elements of social critique are deeply intertwined in it through the use of art form it employs. Unlike the comic, graphic novels are highly political in its content and target the adult readers and attempt to spread awareness in society by raising indispensable issues through the novel.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Ahmed, Naseer and Saurabh Singh. *Kashmir Pending.* Eds. Anindya Chandra Roy and Sarnath Banerjee. New Delhi: Phantomville, 2007. Print.

Banerjee, Sarnath. *Corridor.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2004. Print.

- - - . *The Barn Owl`s Wondrous Capers*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007. Print.

- - - . *The Harappa Files* .New Delhi: Harper-Collins, 2010. Print

Chatterjee, Rimi. *Killer*. Comix.India. Vol 2-Girl Power. 2010.

Ghosh, Vishwajyoti. *Delhi Calm*. New Delhi: Harper-Collins, 2010. Print.

Patil, Amruta. *Kari.* New Delhi: Harper-Collins, 2008. Print.

Natarajan,Sridivya and S.Anand. *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability.* New Delhi: Navayana, 2011. Print.

Natarajan,Sridivya and Aparajita Ninan**.** *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty.* New Delhi: Navayana, 2011. Print.

Sajad,Malik. *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir.*London: Fourth Estate,2015.Print.

Secondary Sources

Baetens, Jan. *Graphic Novel*. Belgium: Leuven UP, 2001. Print.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Print.

Bhatia, Gautam. *Lie: Traditional Tale of Modern India.* New Delhi: Tranquebar, 2010.

Goggin, Joyce, and Dan Hassler-Forest. *Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form.* North Carolina: McFarland, 2010. Print.

Monnin, Katie. *Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies for the Secondary ELA Classroom.* Gainesville: Maupin, 2010. Print.

Poynor, Rick. *No More Rules: Graphic Design to Postmodernism*. London: Lawrence King, 2003. Print.

Sen Orijit. *River of Stories.* New Delhi: Penguin, 1994. Print.

Singh, Parismita. *The Hotel at the End of the World.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2009. Print.

Sipe R., Lawrence, and Sylvia Pantaleo. *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality.* New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Will, Eisner. *A Contract with God.* New York: Norton, 2006. Print.